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SUBJECT: PRONACO PROPOSES A NEW CONSTITUTION

Summary

1. (U) The Pro National Conference (PRONACO), a coalition of Nigerian civil society groups and ethnic nationalities, held meetings in Lagos from April 3 - 7 to begin drafting an entirely new constitution. PRONACO intends to generate public support for a national referendum to ratify this constitution and subsequently to demand GON compliance. While PRONACO enjoys support from many high-profile opposition figures, the convention has little traction with the general public and does not promise to be a vehicle to mobilize popular discontent against the Obasanjo administration. Moreover, the group has been stricken by internal divisions that have weakened its message and its impact. End Summary.

PRONACO Plans to Create New Constitution

2. (U) On April 3, representatives from several ethnic nationalities and civil society organizations commenced a week-long constitutional conference. PRONACO is led by elder statesman Anthony Enahoro and Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka. Enahoro urged delegates to use the conference to identify and resolve critical issues which they considered vital to social justice, equity, accountability, transparency and development. PRONACO Public Affairs Officer Wale Okunniyi said their main objective was to draft a new constitution to achieve true participatory democratic governance, in which all Nigerians would have a chance to contribute to the country's development and progress. Okunniyi said PRONACO wanted the conference's resolutions to be subjected to a national referendum and then forwarded to the GON for implementation. (Comment. PRONACO forgot to answer how they would conduct a national referendum without GON imprimatur and participation. They did not answer because they could not. The idea of a referendum is pabulum without the GON, and to think the GON would hold a referendum to benefit PRONACO is the acme of wishful thought. End Comment.)

PRONACO Produces Committees, Not Much Else

3. (U) After a week of deliberation, the conference established six committees to make recommendations in the areas of government's geo-political structure, fiscal arrangement, system of government, security forces, citizenship, and human rights. The conference adjourned until May to allow sufficient time for the committees work. Enahoro told the closing session that the long adjournment would also enable PRONACO leaders to consult with key interest groups to ensure larger and wider participation, including private and business organizations, women's groups, youth associations, religious bodies, political parties, academic and professional bodies as well as other, large civil society groups. He explained their absence would otherwise weaken the conference's ability to make demands of the GON.

Comment

4. (U) Conceived as the popular alternative to the Obasanjo-inspired political reform conference held 2004-2005, the PRONACO conference did not get off the ground until 2006, after the constitutional amendments from the pro-Obasanjo reform conference had been tabled before the National Assembly. Despite lofty goals and objectives, PRONACO leaders do not have clear plans for actualizing conference resolutions and lack power to do so. In addition, PRONACO is probably incapable of mustering the financial resources that such a referendum entails. Given this scenario, the PRONACO conference will likely be yet another exercise in futility. End Comment.

BROWNE